



**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
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Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the **Commission on Children**.

My name is Andrew Lachman and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Center for School Change. The Center is a statewide, not-for-profit organization that supports instructional improvement and assists districts in closing achievement gaps. We do this through technical assistance to school districts; through leadership development programs for superintendents, principals and parents; and through public policy research.

Research studies show a clear linkage between student achievement and family involvement. Students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, pass their classes and be promoted, have fewer discipline problems, and graduate and pursue higher education.

Given the research findings, the Center, in collaboration with the Commission on Children, created a 12-week leadership development program for parents, Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE). Parents SEE provides parents with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to partner with schools to improve education. Participants explore questions at the heart of leadership, change, partnering, and education policy including: What do effective schools look like? How do schools function? How and why do schools change? What is a parent's role in children's learning and school improvement?

By the end of the program, parents have a toolkit that enables them to address public policy issues and engage as parents and civic leaders to improve schools for all children. As one parent explained, *"This course gave me insight into what parents need in order to be effective advocates for change."* The Parents SEE curriculum provides parents with the skills and understandings necessary for them to become leaders, change agents, and active participants in education policy development and governance at the school, district, and state levels. Graduates of the program are currently serving as leaders in local school parent organizations, on school leadership teams, and on community school boards.

Parents SEE has been offered in Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, East Hartford, Greenwich, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, Norwalk, Plainville, Stamford,

Waterbury, Windham and Windsor. The local programs have been supported by grants from foundations, corporations, community organizations, businesses, and the Parent Trust Fund. Parents SEE has garnered attention from nationally recognized experts in parent leadership training.

The Commission on Children has generated substantial federal dollars in support of children and families and in support of state and local budgets. The Commission contributes to state and local coffers \$1.45 in federal and philanthropic dollars for every dollar invested in its budget.

The Center for School Change urges you to reject the Governor's proposed consolidation of the Commission on Children. Eliminating the Commission on Children as a separate entity would lead to the loss of federal funds and private grants and would mean less oversight and accountability for children and families. It will make it harder to eliminate Connecticut's achievement gap and ensure excellence for all.